

**U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski**  
**Congressional Record Statement Recognizing American Education Week**  
**November 15, 2010**

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Mr. President, as the granddaughter of a teacher and as a parent, education is one of my passions and priorities. So I rise today to commemorate the start of American Education Week, which seeks to shine a light on the importance of providing every child in America with a quality education so that they are prepared to contribute to our nation's future as adults. Further, American Education Week gives each of us an opportunity to celebrate the good things that are happening in our schools, rededicate ourselves to help schools improve where improvement is needed, and to honor the parents, educators, students, and education support professionals who strive to do their best to ensure that every child receives a quality education each and every day. Each of the next four days will celebrate a different partner in the education of our children.

Tomorrow, American Education Week will focus our attention on our children's first and most important teachers—their parents. In my own state of Alaska, parents' contributions to their children's education is so important that we have been called to observe the entire month of November as Parental Involvement Month. This observance is intended to encourage all Alaskans to recognize the importance of and encourage parental involvement in school improvement and student achievement. Other states have proclaimed other months to be Parental Involvement Month. Why? We know instinctively, the day our children are born, that we are responsible for shaping their future. Everything we do influences our children and whether or not they grow up to love learning. When we read to our children before bedtime, as we teach them colors, shapes, right, and wrong, and the value of hard work and honesty, and as we help them with homework, book reports, and college applications our voices and examples are the strongest influences in their lives. If our children see us checking out books for ourselves at the library, if we volunteer at their school and participate in making their school better they learn from our example that their education is important. If we have high expectations for our children and consistently communicate that, our children can fulfill their potential. Our children want to rise to our expectations. So, I call on all of my fellow parents to fulfill your children's expectations of you.

On Wednesday, the focus of American Education Week will shift to those too-often overlooked individuals who play such important roles in our schools—the Education Support Professionals. Mr. President, these are folks who, day after day and for little pay and less recognition keep the cogs

running smoothly in our schools. They keep our children safe, guide them in their behavior, give out hugs, and provide help when things get tough during the day. Take a moment, Mr. President, to look back on your own school days. Think of the school bus driver who made sure everyone was seated and reasonably quiet on the way to school or who would wait as you ran to catch the bus. Think of the nurse who took care of you and called your mom that day you had a fever. Or the lunch lady who made sure you took a helping of vegetables and didn't forget your milk. Sometimes, if you forgot your lunch money, she'd give you lunch anyway if you promised to pay tomorrow. One stern look from any of these good people would set your feet back on the right path, and you loved them for it. Just as many children love their teacher's aide who can explain that thorny math problem better than the teacher or the specialist who helps them overcome a physical or learning challenge. Remember, on Wednesday, to think of these good folks who shaped your life, and think good thoughts for those who do so now across our great nation.

On Thursday, community leaders are invited to come into our nation's classrooms and serve as educators to get a glimpse of what the job is really like. We've all been to school, and we've all known many teachers. Being a teacher looks easy, but it isn't. Teachers need to know how to reach every child, excite every child about learning, and help every child fulfill his or her potential. The best way to do those things is different for every child. Mr. President, we all remember our favorite teachers, and if we traded stories they'd go like this: "I had this teacher once who was so hard, and expected so much, but he cared about me. He was the best teacher I ever had." Or, "I had a teacher who really knew what I was about and she really helped me learn that year. Boy, was her class hard, but I loved that teacher!" Teaching, Mr. President, is both a skill and an art. It's hard work, and it's often thankless work. Too often a classroom will include children who come to school unprepared to learn or who are dealing with serious problems at home. But every single teacher across this nation wants just one thing—to help every single one of their students to learn. On Thursday, think of your favorite teachers and thank them, and make a wish that every student across America has a teacher who is inspiring, skilled, caring, and kind.

On Friday, Mr. President, American Education Week calls on us to honor a different kind of educator. They are too often overlooked, forgotten, or, frankly, given a really hard time. I'm referring to the substitute teacher. Those hardy, brave souls who go into a different classroom every day to help educate our children deserve our thanks and recognition. Often called before dawn to cover for a teacher who is unexpectedly ill, they can teach kindergarten one day and high school math the next.

The best of them have one common characteristic—they can settle a classroom full of strangers down with a glance and inspire their temporary students with a word. Their stories are the stuff of legend. There was the sub who learned in the nick of time that one of her students brought a stink bomb to class because he knew there would be a substitute that day. There was the substitute who learned her students' goal of the day was to make her cry, and she did, but she was back in class with the students after lunch. Then there was the sub whose first day on the job was taking 28 seven year olds on a field trip to the zoo. Substitute teachers must be disciplined but caring. They must be flexible but adhere to routine. They need thick skin and a great sense of humor. I admire them tremendously.

Mr. President, while American Education Week does not specifically highlight the school principal, I am pleased and proud to honor our nation's principals here today as well. Whatever role the principal plays, from instructional leader, head of maintenance, chief disciplinarian, financial guru, and even part-time recess monitor, the school principal's ability to impact the success of the school cannot be underestimated. The most important of those roles, however, must always be that of instructional leader. Everyone in the school community, from students to the superintendent, from parents to future employers, rely on the principal to run an effective school in which students learn. The skill set for being a principal is not the same as for a teacher. A principal must be able to set the agenda for learning for not only the students, but for teachers and other staff as well. He or she is in charge of not only the safety, well-being and future of the children in the school, but must also guide and inspire the staff. The principal must be a diplomat, bring the community into the school, satisfy the taxpayer, and meet the needs of the school. The principal must mediate, command, and inspire any number of groups on any given day. The best of them are often taken for granted because everything just works. So I encourage my colleagues and the nation to include in their appreciative thoughts this week our schools' hard-working, multi-tasking educational leaders—our nation's principals.

Mr. President, in closing, as my colleagues here in the United States Senate consider, applaud, and recognize the hard work of the many Americans who work every day to make our schools the best, I would also encourage them to do their part. As you know, the Senate HELP Committee continues to work toward reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I look forward to continuing and completing that work next year. We know that this law's goal is to help ensure that

every single child in every community across the country has the opportunity and the tools to succeed. That is, that every child will fulfill his or her potential regardless of wealth, ethnicity, disability, or location. We all want that. Regardless of our views on the role, or the degree of the role the federal government should play in our nation's schools—whether we think federal funding should come with the strings of accountability or not and to what degree—I hope we can all agree on one thing. That is the proud tradition of bipartisanship we and our predecessors have achieved when it comes to education issues. We may disagree about our points of view but in the end the final product is one most of us have been able to support.

I hope, Mr. President, that as we observe American Education Week and in the days and months to come that our nation's children as well as the adults can look back at us with pride and say we got something good done for the country through civility, cooperation, bipartisanship, and a genuine love for our nation.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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